

Women entrepreneurs help each other grow

with Yente's Sparring Partner Programme

Yente connects women entrepreneurs from around the world

All over the world women entrepreneurs face the same challenges. They want to run their companies with a close eye on quality and with opportunities to go for growth. At the same time they feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the welfare of their families and their employees. With this combination of commercial and social enterprise, women help provide the building blocks for a sustainable future.

Nonetheless, it is often more difficult for women to obtain credit for making a start to developing their businesses, as well as accessing knowledge and reaching national or international markets. The Yente Foundation acts on their behalf as mediator and matchmaker as the exchange of knowledge, expertise and trade contacts can provide an important contribution towards strengthening the position of women, as well as the income generated by their companies. With good reason, because it is often women who are increasingly determining for the opportunities of ensuing generations.

Linking together and reinforcing

The Yente Foundation employs various resources for linking together and reinforcing women entrepreneurship. The most personal and immediate of these are the Yente international trade and information missions: 5-day programmes in which women entrepreneurs from different continents can exchange knowhow and expertise with each other. This is organized in the form of networking meetings, seminars, speed dating sessions, presentations and company visits.

Similar missions have taken place over the last few years including exchanges with South Africa (2006 & 2007) and Peru and Bolivia (2008 & 2009). They provide an international platform for women entrepreneurs to make new contacts or to keep up existing relationships. The mission results are becoming increasingly measureable and specific. They can range from international collaborations, through to the refinement of products for international markets, concrete export orders and even training programmes.



The web community as a marketplace

Despite this, Yente wants to go even further because these missions are only able to reach out to a limited part of the female entrepreneurial potential. Many more women should be able to find each other and remain in contact about matters concerning their enterprises. It is for these reasons that Yente has created an informal and lively 'marketplace' in the form of the **MYente web community** - www.myente.org. Women entrepreneurs from around the world can meet up here, exchange information, present their companies, offer products, etc - in other words, do business. Any female entrepreneur who is not yet registered with MYente should do it right away: www.myente.org

Solidarity is the theme

It feels like a success when Yente succeeds in connecting women entrepreneurs who start doing business together. Just as valuable is the feeling of solidarity that can arise when two women entrepreneurs from different parts of the world come together. Many women have experienced this dynamic spark when meeting up with others on one of the Yente missions. Such meetings ended up being significant for each party, not only as entrepreneurs but also as private individuals. There is a good chance that the exchange of information and opinions acts as an incentive to make improvements to one's own company or, for instance, by making modifications to products. However, to actually carry out these plans, you will need to remain motivated and determined.

Unfortunately, many women entrepreneurs find that, once they have returned home and back to work, the day-to-day demands of running their businesses gradually absorb all the good intentions they may have had. In order to help retain the energy and ideas generated during the mission, the **Yente Sparring Partner Programme** has been designed for permanent and long term interaction between partner entrepreneurs, starting off with making plans for achieving specific results.

Sparring partner programme = sharing information and experiences

Trade relationships revolve around doing specific business, whereas the sparring partner relationship involves an amicable and trustworthy exchange of knowledge, understanding and experience from one female entrepreneur helping another.

In principal the Sparring Partner Programme is all about women entrepreneurs guiding and supporting each other: women from South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Peru,

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Strengthening women entrepreneurship worldwide



Bolivia and the Netherlands can pose questions covering all aspects of entrepreneurship or they can request Yente for a sparring partnership.

Women in the Netherlands often have better access to all sorts of business institutions and resources for help and information. Therefore many of them are willing to put their knowhow at the disposal of women entrepreneurs in other partner countries. In turn Dutch sparring partners will be happy to learn from the daily experiences of fellow entrepreneurs from different parts of the world.

The Sparring Partner Programme is a unique form of mutual support

It goes without saying that sparring partner relationships are possible between women entrepreneurs from any country. This unique form of mutual support flourishes on the basis of trust, fellowship and equality.

How it can work

Viviana from Colombia and Hilde from the Netherlands

Hilde is a stylist, designer and trend watcher. For a long time now she has wished to do something in other countries, but has had no idea of where to start. That was until she met Viviana during a trade mission. Viviana wants to market a line of Bolivian designer products at home and eventually abroad too.

Step by step along the way

Sparring partner relationships are started with either a question or a request. The subject can be about product development, design or process improvements, marketing or finance. Or perhaps about how to improve language skills, start up a website or adjust the quality of products. Advice can also be requested for increasing the number of contacts in a specific market.

You then go along with Yente to find a fellow entrepreneur who can supply you with answers. In principle this will be a female sparring partner, although it might also be a man. In case you already have a particular individual in mind with the right knowhow and experience to help you out, Yente could act as mediator, requesting this person to become a sparring partner on your behalf.

There are two other ways to find your sparring partner. You yourself can try to find a sparring partner within the MYente web community. The other way is to involve your network organization in setting up your request and searching a suitable sparring partner for you.

Getting started

Yente aims at women entrepreneurs who have already been running their own companies for approximately three years. Their companies are bigger than micro-enterprises, though certainly not large companies, and they are ready for the next step. This phase may include increasing production levels, seeking new markets including export, improving efficiency, developing new products, finding new suppliers, new collaborations, etc.

For starting up a sparring partner relationship it is important to have good access to the internet. The entrepreneur must be able to use and have free access to this medium for communication purposes. Sparring partners communicate in English if at all possible, or Spanish if more convenient. Other languages can be chosen in case both sparring partners have a specific language preference.

This is how the Sparring Partner Agreement operates

1. Both sparring partners put down all their information into a so-called Statement of Intent. This document describes their definite and specific request and also the outcome that they expect from their sparring partner relationship.



- Moreover, in their Statement of Intent, both sparring partners will indicate the period the relationship will run for and also the amount of time both parties are able and willing to invest in keeping in contact with each other. The period of the relationship depends on the question and the availability of the partner and may run from several months, right up to a couple of years.
- With this Statement, both parties make clear what they expect from each other and what they have committed themselves to.
- For monitoring purposes, Yente and its partner organizations use the Statement of Intent and the reports made by the sparring partners during the period of collaboration. Each 'good practice' booked by the sparring partners is a success in which Yente and other women entrepreneurs love to share.

How it can work

Gretel from Peru and Trix from the Netherlands

During a trade mission Gretel realised that the English language was very important for doing business in the Netherlands. So now Gretel really wants to improve her English. Using email, Trix is going to give Gretel English lessons. Trix wants to expand her activities to Latin America and is looking for representatives who can introduce her English lessons and translation skills to that market.

Also network organizations

The Sparring Partner Programme is open to women entrepreneurs, although network organizations can also get involved. Many network organizations for women entrepreneurs are linked to Yente. As sparring partners these networks will be more than happy to help answering questions about setting up a new network, setting aims, combining forces, laying down network management tasks and methods of implementation, services that may be offered, marketing and communications.

In turn, the network organizations can help individual members to formulate their requests when they would like to approach Yente as

mediator for finding a sparring partner.

Furthermore, Yente is happy to bring network organizations from partner countries into contact with each other.

Search and find your own sparring partner

Do you have a question or would you like to make a request? Let it be known via MYente, or put it to your network organization or directly to Yente so that together we can find the right sparring partner for you.

Remember that by completing the Statement of Intent you are setting up an important arrangement to which you are committed for a particular period of time. A sparring partner relationship is voluntary, but not without commitment.

Finally, we expect that you either already know or want to know more about the Yente programmes. What's more: We want you to spread the word about Yente's Sparring Partner Programmes among as many other women entrepreneurs you might meet. Remember, Yente is all about connecting women!



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